

Documents on Diplomacy: Lessons

Thirteen Ministers for Thirteen States A Simulation of Power in 1785

Standard:

- I. Culture
- II. Time, Continuity, and Change
- III. People, Places, and Environments
- VI. Power, Authority, and Governance
- VII. Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- IX. Global Connections
- X. Civic Ideals and Practices

Grade Level:

9–12

Objectives:

The student will:

- Analyze primary documents
- Assess powers of the 13 states and the national government
- Determine if sovereignty applies to the states or the national government
- Initiate foreign policy decisions

Time:

2–3 class periods (or less if some procedures are omitted based on prior student knowledge)

Materials:

Documents: **1785** *Thirteen Ministers for Thirteen States*
1786 *The Abasement of Congress*
1787 *Excerpts from States and Treaties*

Resources: *Key Players during the Articles of Confederation*

Exercises: *Map: Thirteen Colonies Become States*
A Testament of Action
Wherein Lies the Advantages of the Sovereign States
Weighing the Facts

Materials: Stickers (enough for class) for use as seals on created documents

Procedures:

1. Distribute the exercise, *Thirteen Colonies Become States*. Review by having students identify the original 13 states.
2. Have students name the states included in the New England, Middle Atlantic, and Southern regions (grouping commonly done with study of Colonial America as well).
 - a. **New England:** New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut
 - b. **Middle Atlantic:** New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware
 - c. **Southern:** Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia

3. Place students in the following groups:

- a.** New England States
- b.** Middle Atlantic States
- c.** Southern States
- d.** The Confederation Congress
- e.** French diplomatic delegation to the United States, headed by Louis Guillaume Otto.

4. Distribute the document, *Thirteen Ministers for Thirteen States* to ALL groups.

- Provide the document, *Excerpts from States and Treaties*, to the National Government and each state group. [Note: Depending on time available and student proficiency, teachers may substitute the complete version of *States and Treaties*.]

- Supply the document, *The Abasement of Congress*, only to the French dignitaries. The three documents are intended to elicit varying opinions from the different groups.

Provide background information on John Adams and Count Louis Guillaume Otto by giving students a copy of *Key Figures during the Articles of Confederation*, by reading it aloud, or some other method.

5. Students should read and process the document(s) from either the perspective of the states, the National Government, or the French.

6. Supply all groups with the handout, *Wherein Lies the Advantages of the Sovereign States*. The States can use this information plus ideas from the documents to determine what is in their best interests: commercial treaties with foreign nations, appointment of “official” individual state delegations to foreign nations, informal/formal trade agreements among the states, etc.

The National Government must beg, plead, and propose actions that maintain the “national” identity and interests of the entire United States. On the other hand, the French Delegation can propose as it wishes, to see this new America united or perhaps conduct relations with individual states.

7. Tasks for groups, in addition to information stated in #5:

- a.** New England, Middle Atlantic, and Southern States. These groups, working independently, should decide what future foreign policy actions to undertake, based on the best interests of each group. They should be prepared to defend their proposals.
- b.** The National Government should identify points of interest that all states should adhere to as members of the Confederation. Emphasize that in truth, independence was achieved by all states, not states behaving independently.
- c.** The French Delegation should assess all information and determine the best course for France at this juncture in history.

- 8.** Each group should propose ideas to include in the exercise, *A Testament of Action*. This will be the official document issued once all deliberations are completed.
- 9.** Allow the groups to interact as roving diplomats. Visiting with other States, the French Delegation, and/or members of the National Government might result in NEW deals or CONFIRM the wisdom of proposals already made. The teacher should limit these visits to no more than ten minutes. Students may visit more than one group. If additional time is needed, do rotations of 5-10 minutes each.
- 10.** Groups should finalize the handout, *A Testament of Action* after diplomatic visits. This document will be published to inform citizens of the United States of what transpired in the meetings. Use "seals" supplied by the teacher or draw official seals for each person signing.
- 11.** Have one person from each group read its document. All listening groups should record the pros and cons of documents as they are presented.
- 12.** If time permits, have each group ask questions of and/or make comments about the other at conclusion of each presentation. This models more closely a type of public forum that citizens would expect in 1786.
- 13.** Debriefing Session
 - a.** Discuss the pros and cons of each document.
 - b.** Which group appears to have the most strengths? Weaknesses?
 - c.** Which proposals can be implemented with the least difficulty?
 - d.** Which proposals most negatively affect the United States as a unified country?
 - e.** Analyze the paths chosen by the states. Did all or some decide to act independently or regionally or avoid disrupting the union through divisive measures? Probe for reasons explaining paths chosen.
 - f.** What diplomatic actions were taken by the French? Did their actions prove divisive to the United States? Explain.
 - g.** Describe the difficulties and/or positive encounters experienced while serving as diplomats.
 - h.** Identify three positive reasons for the states to behave as 13 independent ambassadors. Identify three negative reasons for this style of diplomacy.
 - i.** Identify three positive and three negative reasons for the United States to have one ambassador representing all states.
 - j.** Speculate about the future of the United States if the states had decided to retain more power without replacing the Articles of Confederation with the Constitution.
- 14.** Independent Culminating Activity: Distribute the handout, *Weighing The Facts*, to students for individual assessment. This can be done in class or as a homework assignment. Discuss students' assessments. ■

Extension Activity:

Refer to the exercise, *The Abasement of Congress* ■